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Family Matters

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Preface

The first issue of the *Occasional Papers Series* is being launched as part of the preparations for, and the observance of, the International Year of the Family (IYF). The *Series* will provide information on many different family issues. As such, it will be a focus for debate and the reporting of research findings, as well as for providing the expert opinions of scholars and other specialists. The aim of the *Series*, as indeed of IYF generally, is to increase the awareness of and sensitivity to the importance and needs of families by the broadest possible audience. The topics forming the *Series* will therefore be eclectic and far-reaching, and as diversified in treatment and content as the subject they address. At the same time, the topics will reflect a concern for identifying the key concerns of the family.

A difficult decision in launching such a diverse *Series* was selecting which of the many topics of interest should be the first to be printed. Should the lead issue be theoretical or applied, historical or contemporary, or a statement from world-renowned experts or from families themselves? In the course of these deliberations, I remembered the many voices that had been heard so far in the preparatory process to IYF, and the richness of that interest, support and concern. I concluded that, at the risk of fragmentation, an effort should be made to capture the broad spectrum of the interest expressed in families and IYF.

The present issue, therefore, is a testament, bearing witness to the concerns raised at meetings, conferences and study groups convened during the first part of the preparatory phase to IYF.

The text is drawn from various statements that I have delivered in my capacity as Coordinator for IYF, all over the world. Like any record, it is lacking in some respects. Obviously, there are many topics on which meetings have yet to be organized. Not all topics are amenable to this kind of treatment, nor have I had the privilege of participating in even a portion of the many gatherings assembled on issues related to IYF. In addition, the statements themselves are neither definitive nor complete. The learning process is ongoing and, as the course of study and debate unfolds, so will the questions, and possibly their answers.

Some of the concepts recorded here have enjoyed remarkable consensus, while others have invited debate. There is a wealth of opinion on what is important, on what the problems might be and on where solutions should be sought. This diversity of opinion is one of the great resources of IYF, and will be demonstrated throughout the *Occasional Papers Series*.

The one omnipresent feature of the accelerating debate on IYF is the conviction that families are and will remain a pivotal element of the human experience. Regardless of whether the views on the family are reformist or conservative, futuristic or nostalgic, or whether families are seen as part of the solution or part of the problem, people everywhere know that the the family matters. This first issue of the *Series* is an attempt to convey this diversely expressed but universally held conviction.

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1. The family: diversity and dynamism for unity

"We stand at a crossroads between the conception of the family which prevailed in the past and that of the future. We must take account of the past, we must work in the present, and we must look towards the future."

Catherine Lalumière

The family knows no frontiers

All over the world, families are as different and diversified as they are alike. Vital, productive families are essential to the world's future; they are the cradle of the generations to come. Their strengths and weaknesses largely reflect the societal fabric of every country. As the world's oldest form of expression of human relationship, the family has survived thousands of years, adapting itself constantly to changing socio-economic conditions and the progress of humanity.

In the modern world, society is made up of a complex set of relationships, among which the family is one. In fact, it should be conceived as a very special relationship; one of equity and reciprocity between genders and generations, based on biology, law, custom or choice, and often upon economics. Deriving from an etymology common to all cultures and traditions, the family knows no frontiers.

There is no simple view of the family, nor can there be a universally applicable definition. Throughout recorded history and in different parts of the world, many diverse types of families have existed displaying pronounced variations in their structures. In addition, new and divergent family forms are constantly evolving. So also are perceptions of the functions and roles of the family. The kinds of interpersonal relationships within the family differ both among and within national societies. This diversity and divergence is a faithful reflection of the cultural pluralism of the individuals that constitute societies.

More recently, new types of families have begun to emerge, such as the single-parent family, which do not fit the traditional characterizations of the family structure such as "nuclear" and "extended" families. Yet in most countries, legal systems and policy-making processes lag behind such changes, leading to a failure to support the needs of family members in a fully integrated, familial context. The increased prevalence of single-parent families, most of which are headed by women, pose important challenges for legal, social and governmental policy-makers.

The family must be viewed as a living, evolving institution, which is affected by socio-economic factors as well as by the changes that shape the social environment in which it functions. It has not escaped the impact of the complex problems brought about by the advancement of civilization. Change has also occurred in different places at different times, at different speeds and to different extents, creating even more variety in families. Families are undergoing constant change because of numerous factors. These include demographic trends; socio-cultural changes; economic recessions and depressions; wars; famine; unemployment; migration; technological innovation; the processes of industrialization and urbanization; the quest for equality between men and women; and widening opportunities for women. In addition, there have been shifts in collective values, particularly those supporting individualism, in which the worth of the individual can be seen as transcending that of the group and in which a high value is placed on self-expression, self-realization, self-fulfilment, autonomy and the freedom of the individual. The impact of these factors, which vary greatly from region to region, is a driving force in the creation of new family structures, cultural values and socio-economic conditions.

The family: A central topic in social policy and development

Central to the purpose of any international effort on families is the need to encourage professionals and policy makers to find more effective ways of strengthening them. Action should proceed from three basic observations:

(a) The family is universally recognized as a basic unit of society. In spite of the many changes in society that have altered their roles and functions, families continue to provide the natural framework for the emotional and material support essential to the growth and well-being of their members. Additionally, families are a basic social unit of production and consumption and, as such, are at the heart of the economic process. Their needs must be intimately connected with the objectives of economic and social development, as a minimum standard of progress. In short, families are engines of the economic and social development process, and must be accounted for when establishing policies and priorities for economic and social development;

(b) The topic of the family is pivotal to a broad spectrum of social policy and developmental issues. Perhaps no other group lends itself better to a cross-sectoral and integrated approach in dealing with social progress or offers such a unique convergence of numerous issues. In the last two decades, the ever-increasing concern for the fundamental rights and well-being of individuals, particularly those who are disadvantaged, marginalized or discriminated against, as well as the efforts to improve their lot, concurrently has led to the rediscovery of the family. An important corollary of those activities has been the recognition of families as forming a crucial social safety net for improving the well-being of individual family members. Recently, this renewed interest in the family has accelerated in different parts of the world as the result of harsh economic realities and sweeping socio-political changes and shifts in traditional values;

(c) The family, as a living, evolving social institution, faces what may be its most difficult challenge in the history of the human species. Many societies are changing so rapidly that the speed of change alone is a major factor of stress in families. Never before in history have there been so many and so dramatic changes in such a short time. Human beings, however, often do not adapt as rapidly as changes occur. New attitudes and behaviours require time before they are learned and internalized. In many societies, old traditions of child-rearing or spousal relations have become outmoded while the new ones have yet to be launched or accepted, forming a kind of normative vacuum. At the same time, much of the societal change that challenges individual families originates and is promulgated at the familial level. Families are not just recipients of change: they also serve as its agents. Acknowledging the reflective interaction of society and families is basic to a thorough appreciation of the family as a fluid and dynamic social form.

In short, the challenges that families face in the present-day world and the stress that they undergo are numerous, largely depending upon the level of national socio-economic development and diversification. In performing functions vital to the well-being of its members and society, the family has responded to these changes in ways ranging from adaptation without significant dysfunction to total breakdown. Nevertheless, the struggle of families to respond successfully to change has been significant and deserves careful study. Therefore, IYF is an attempt to support families in their efforts to adapt and change as well as to support their pivotal role in social development.

2. Why have an IYF

"Happy families are all alike, every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way."

Leo Tolstoy

Why not have an IYF?

There is a popular legend of a philosophy professor who set a final exam consisting only of the question: "Why?", printed on a blank page. The student who attained the highest mark answered: "Why not?". While this may not offer much help to philosophy students studying for final exams it is, to a certain extent, instructive in the case of IYF. Families are, and have been, universally present, recognized in some form in all societies and fundamentally important to the structure and action of the societies of which they are part. Families are basic, foundational elements of the human social experience. Given the primordial significance of families, it is tempting to answer the question: "Why have an international year of the family?" in the words of the student: "Why not?". If, however, it can be accepted that the rationale for IYF is obvious, the question is really: "Why now?".

For five decades, the United Nations has been the major global presence in promoting, advocating and raising awareness of peace, security, economic and social development and higher standards of life in larger freedom. But promotion and advocacy are not ends in themselves. They are the first steps to action: real, concrete action, benefiting individuals, social groups and entire societies as was the case with major United Nations events. The international years and decades of the 1970s and 1980s devoted to women, children, persons with disabilities, the elderly, youth and literacy have adequately proved that international years can successfully focus awareness, attention and the conscience of the world on important issues.

Those events, however, stressed a sectoral approach to social problems by concentrating primarily on selected aspects of human development. The subject of families offers a much more comprehensive and, at the same time, synthesizing approach, since the family represents the fullest reflection, at the grass-roots level, of the strengths and weaknesses of the social and developmental welfare environment. That is the first basic consideration in favour of an integrated approach to social progress and development through the family, and thereby is the strongest argument in favour of IYF.

IYF: An effort to support families

The proclamation of IYF has been a direct result of the growing international concern over the precarious situation of families. It is conceived as a concerted effort of the international community, in harmony with a large number of crucial partners - Governments, the voluntary and private sectors, the United Nations system and other intergovernmental organizations - to support families as a basic social unit; to gain and promote an accurate understanding of family issues; to initiate and execute activities to address these issues, particularly at the local and national levels; and to create institutional capabilities for implementing changes at all levels that strengthen the family.

In comparison with similar earlier events, IYF is a unique undertaking. As the concerns of family apply to most social policy areas, it is within the scope of IYF to combine and synthesize several social issues, bringing them down to a common denominator of action. It offers an

opportunity, as a noted expert on family policies put it, to bring together the threads of social life that have previously been treated separately and disjointedly.

Concerns and reservations

Initially, the idea of IYF provoked some questions, if not fears. Some of them were:

(a) That an emphasis on family life might undermine the national and international accomplishments in the struggle for the equal rights of men and women;

(b) That through IYF, an attempt would be made to impose a standard definition of the family and promote one specific family model;

(c) That the observance of IYF, by stressing the rights of families, might neglect to stress the important responsibilities of families.

However, after the initial phase of the debate on IYF, such concerns seem to have undergone a creative evolution. From the standpoint of the United Nations, IYF is intended to strengthen the cause of women's rights and equality between the sexes in all aspects of familial relationships; to respect the existing diversities; and to promote concepts based on family rights and responsibilities alike.

IYF: A platform for action

IYF, like individual families, is not an undifferentiated, monochromatic formula. IYF is a dynamic process, involving individuals and groups at the grass-roots levels in preparing for the observance and follow-up to IYF in 1994. By focusing on action at the national and local levels, IYF must, and will, highlight the many diverse strengths and weaknesses, and problems and potentialities of families in different parts of the world. IYF can serve as a platform for the review, reform and improvement of policies, based on a principle of participation at the grass-roots level. It is therefore an important mechanism through which people can influence the policy-making process at the local, national and regional levels.

It is important to recognize IYF as a statement of commitment on the part of Member States. The year 1994 was unanimously proclaimed as IYF by the States who collectively make up the General Assembly. 1/ The proclamation of IYF is a visible symbol of the willingness of those States to address the question of families internationally and furthermore, to focus on action at the local and national levels. IYF is an open invitation for research, debate and action in the development of family policy.

Furthermore, IYF is a platform for action because it calls for the mobilization and empowerment of families. Despite the best efforts of the United Nations as an international body, and the combined efforts of major national and international non-governmental organizations, they will not succeed without the support and participation of families themselves. The biggest bloc of political influence and power with a vested interest in family policy are families. The principle of empowerment must be more than just an aspiration of IYF; it must be the *modus operandi* of it.

3. Changing families in changing societies

"Freude muss Leid, Leid muss Freude haben." (Joy needs woe, woe requires joy.)

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Change and evolution

Global concern for the family is not born out of a nostalgic desire for simpler times, when rules and roles were less clouded by ambiguity, and the future less uncertain. Indeed, the so-called uncomplicated world of yesterday was in many ways not the sort of society that people might want to live in tomorrow; notably, for example, in respect of the subjugation of women, the reprehensible exploitation of children or the neglect of the elderly and persons with disabilities. On the contrary, the concerns that spawned IYF are very much a reflection of intensely contemporary issues, with real and substantial implications for the future.

The family, like the rest of society, has undergone a process of wholesale, transformative change. In this process, the family has been both the purveyor and the recipient of change; sometimes acting as its agent or, alternatively, being transformed by external forces. In some cases, the process has been adaptive, in others, destructive, threatening the survival of the family. Whatever the specific causes, many of the things that are nostalgically understood to constitute a family, for better or worse, are now lost to history. In addition, many of the stereotypes or conventions used to describe family life are often anachronistic and no longer borne out by reality.

Global transformation

Perhaps the most glaring example of change is the case of rural and urban families. In many parts of the world, urban centres increasingly consist of extended family units, drawn together as a survival strategy in the face of deteriorating economies and the lack of individual opportunity. Paradoxically, rural settings, once the province of extended families, are becoming increasingly nuclear, as the productive limits of subdivided land reduce the capacity of large families to support themselves. One reason why the family is so important at present is because increasingly less is known about what the family is in reality.

The global transformation of society has taken a number of forms, each with a unique set of opportunities and dangers for the family. For instance, geography has become less reliable as a predictor of culture than at any time in history. The place where one happens to be is increasingly less important for determining who one is. For centuries the limits to mobility have been one form of ensuring cultural survival. This protection is vanishing rapidly as the world shrinks and the magic allure of economic globalization is on the lips of business people everywhere. In some cases, this transformation breeds positive change, releasing individuals, for example, from the cultural bounds of traditionally oppressive attitudes. In other cases, the shrinking world and its transnational economy have had problematic consequences.

Thousands upon thousands of migrant families, escaping scarcity and deprivation, wars or persecution are at present wandering the planet in search of security, a home and a better future. Such families are particularly vulnerable to the separation, and sometimes desertion, of their members. They also often have to shoulder the additional burden of cultural change, difficult processes of adjustment or assimilation, and rapidly transformed interpersonal relationships in the family.

At the same time, the migrant family is a powerful example of the family as a source of personal and group identity; as a place for intimacy, emotional and spiritual nourishment; and as a provider of mutual support in times of crisis and transition. The migrant unit is a general testimony to the importance of the family in the present-day world, and provides one more reason for turning attention to the family as a source of comfort and support on a planet where both are badly needed.

The relevance of the family is obviously not confined to changes in demography or geography nor to the emotional or economic support of its members. Families are affected by, and are a source of, change in the attitudes and values that lie at the very heart of social and global change.

Change as a provider of opportunity

The pace of change to which families are subjected, both internally and externally, has never been so rapid. The rate of cultural, economic and political transformation in the world beggars description. The incessant pounding of change on their consciousness taxes the ability of people to understand, adapt or act thoughtfully in the world about them. Their capacity to cope with change through meaningful and productive action is constantly being challenged.

Families everywhere are in need of support to increase their capacity to adapt to and meet the demands of change. Environmental issues, the shrinking world of commerce and communication, massive political transformation and technological innovation all have profound impacts on families around the world. Environmental, economic and socio-political refugees are a fact of life on the planet. Poverty, displacement, hunger and violence are still ubiquitous, and can strike families with such dramatic rapidity and force that there are few, if any, options available for positive adaptation. Revolution has always happened at a cost, and for some families this cost is too high. Such families deserve protection by all entities acting in concert and under a social contract, in whatever form the latter may exist.

Rapid change is also a time of opportunity: when new and positive social forms can quickly replace those that are antiquated, inappropriate or unjust. History is full of examples of such positive change. It should not, however, be assumed that change will somehow independently generate benefits. The capacity for thoughtful human action is necessary for positive social change and the evidence of that thoughtfulness should be seen in the societies that people build.

Changes in families

The forces of change that have wrought immense transformations in society have brought about equally profound changes in families themselves. Foremost among these changes, particularly in the developed world, are the sweeping accomplishments by and on behalf of women. Although this work is far from complete and there is much more to be achieved, nothing can diminish the remarkable reforms that have already taken place, in families and human society, in response to the rising tide of feminist thought and collective action. What is most astounding is not so much the breadth and depth of this change as the rate at which it has taken place.

The ability of medical technology to control or even to stimulate conception, the increasing numbers of elderly persons in families, the increased sensitivity to the rights and needs of children and persons with disabilities, and the rising rates of crime and substance abuse are additional factors generating internal change in families. Each of these are the subject of mediation through families, and reappear in the various stresses, changes and negotiations that surface in contemporary family life. As with rapid external change, changes internal to the family bring both opportunities and problems, benefits and costs, and certainties and risks.

Fundamental to the notion of family seems to be a dichotomy between the presence of the repressive, hierarchical structures of family life and the absence of a sense of moral obligation, awareness and solidarity concerning others' needs; the dichotomy between power and control, on the one hand, and the equal and inalienable rights of all family members, on the other. Historically, the family has too often been a refuge of patriarchal domination and served as a vehicle for the subjugation of women and children. In such situations, family life has been dominated by: the invocation of exclusively male privilege; intimidation, coercion and threats; economic abuse; child abuse and child labour; and isolation or other forms of emotional abuse.

Positive growth

In singling out, therefore, the need for change to bring about positive growth in and progress for families and society, several crucial components can be conceived as constituting a true partnership in family life:

(a) The establishment of procedures for the sharing of responsibility, including an equitable distribution of work, and for decisions on matters affecting the family to be made together as a family unit;

(b) The creation of respect, trust and support, which means being willing to listen to one another non-judgementally, valuing the opinions of all members, being emotionally affirming, supporting each other's goals in life, and respecting the rights of each person to have his or her own feelings, opinions and choices;

(c) The use of non-threatening behaviour by family members in their relations with one another;

(d) The practice of honesty and accountability, which means communicating openly and truthfully, admitting to mistakes and accepting personal responsibility for feelings, thoughts and behaviour;

(e) The use of negotiation skills in an atmosphere of fairness, which implies seeking mutually satisfying resolutions to conflict, accepting change and being willing to compromise;

(f) The practice of economic partnership, by making financial decisions together as a family and ensuring that all family members benefit;

(g) The use of responsible parenting practices, which means sharing parental responsibilities and being a positive non-violent role model for other members of the family, including children, and thereby providing the foundation for a partnership based on equal rights.

The sharing father

The twentieth century has introduced structural changes into the family and has created problems for many men in their identities as husbands and fathers, at least in the Western world. Fatherhood, however, is clearly both necessary and worthwhile and the problems of men must be addressed.

Some three hundred years ago, William Penn complained that men are generally more concerned about the breed of their horses and dogs than about their children. Indeed, in many families, the role of the father has not evolved much beyond that of the principal or sole financial provider for the family. The increasing accomplishments of mothers as financial providers, and the effects of economic restructuring in some industrialized countries have done much to undermine men's predominantly breadwinner role. To a certain extent, social policy also has

contributed to the latter's declining importance by providing income support and other types of financial programmes for families. Such programmes are and will continue to be necessary; however, the unfortunate result might be that more fathers would neglect their responsibilities. From the point of view of social policy or legislative change, the challenge is to ensure that the financial responsibilities of fathers are recognized without strengthening the view that financial support is the exclusive province of fatherhood. Clearly, part of the solution lies in developing the non-financial dimensions of the father's role in the family, as an active nurturer, educator and emotional supporter of children.

For a variety of reasons, the role of the father provides a graphic and informative example of how an organic view of families is useful, and why such a view is so indispensable to understanding the relationships that make up families.

The case of fatherhood signalizes, first, the crucial interdependencies present in families and, second, the need for a comprehensive family policy that accurately reflects the complexity of familial relationships. Perhaps the most telling aspect is that the issue of fatherhood is most often referred to in relation to issues concerning the advancement of women. More specifically, the contemporary issue of the changed role of the father is largely the result of a changed understanding of the role of mothers.

Equality of the genders

The binding responsibilities engendered by a traditional patriarchal system continue to affect, through the medium of the family, the opportunities available to women. The classic example is the inequitable distribution of labour in the home. A simplistic but thoroughly desirable solution would be to have men assume equal responsibility for domestic work. This solution, however, can only be meaningful in the context of broader social changes, such as those that would ensure that the mother is able to capitalize on a reduced domestic workload by having unfettered access to equal pay for work outside the home. Families must not be penalized for attempting to incorporate fathers in meaningful non-financial ways of supporting mothers in non-traditional roles. Achieving a balance of roles and responsibilities in the home is inextricably entwined with achieving equality of the sexes in society generally.

In many important ways, progress in efforts towards equality of the sexes based on United Nations standards can be accomplished in the context of a harmonized organic view of the interdependencies that define families. The same structures that have limited the full participation of women in society also restrict the movement of men to non-traditional roles. The impact of both constraints combined restricts the ability of families to evolve and change in positive ways. Such challenges, however, are integral to the development of effective family policies and the support of families throughout IYF.

Meanwhile, the programme of IYF stipulates that the well-being of families, the achievement of equal opportunities for women and the shaping of roles by men and women require new perspectives, concepts, patterns of partnership and sharing within families. It is therefore natural that major attention be given to examining and fostering new roles and responsibilities for men. Increased access to family life education and paternity or parental leave as well as other incentives should be provided to encourage and enable fathers to play wider new roles, especially with regard to home-making, child care, child growth and development, and family planning as well as responsible paternity.

4. Social policy challenges

"We must strengthen the family - because it is the family that has a bearing on the future."

George Bush

In proclaiming IYF 1/, the General Assembly decided that the major activities for its observance should be concentrated at the local, regional and national levels and assisted by the United Nations and its system of organizations, in cooperation with intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, as well as interested national organizations. To assist in the identification of local and national priorities, the following categories of issues have been proposed:

(a) Strengthening the family's ability to meet its own needs;

(b) Clarifying and understanding the balance between how the family can satisfy its own needs and what it can expect from public services;

(c) Recognizing the effect of societal problems on family relationships and acknowledging that government policy intervention may be needed to counter any resulting negative effects or exploitation in the family.

The development of the State and civil society has produced a variety of institutions and structures that sometimes compete with the traditional roles and functions of the family. Apart from the State and civil society, there is the market-place, the church, the political party, the social association and various units of production and consumption. Even in traditional societies, some forms of individualism and personal consumption make their appearance and seem to question traditional family patterns. Although the great movements of present times have affected the nature of the family, its essence is here to stay, because there is no substitute for the primary solidarity that links, as well as envelops, the members of a family.

Community and equity: A special relationship

In spite of its transformation, the family continues to be the basic unit of what is called a community: it is, by itself, a community of people, a community of functions, a community of responsibilities and duties, and a community of rights. As such, families perform a plethora of functions that no other element in society can or does.

The family remains a special kind of relationship: between genders and generations, and within civil society, the market, and the State. The special nature of this relationship, based as it is on solidarity and reciprocity, calls for the special treatment of family issues, both from the material and psycho-social points of view.

In the decade to come, society, of which the family will remain the crucial component, will be dominated by a concern with equity: within and between generations; in the allotment and use of resources; in the transfer of resources from one generation to the next, and within the newborn generation. It is in the family that generational equity can flourish first, and it has no functional equivalent.

Because of the changing nature of families, these basic units of society must play an increasing role in the resolution of social problems. In some cases, this role is merely implied, in others, it may be specifically and clearly defined. For example, the equitable sharing of domestic

work is seen as an important requirement for the advancement of women; active parental involvement is seen as important in the education of children; likewise, families are the most important source of preventative health care.

More and more, Governments are retreating from a leading role in providing social services, and are leaving (or returning) that responsibility to families. This movement finds expression at the highest policy levels as well as at the lowest level of field practice. Social workers, teachers, health-care workers and others routinely include the family among the resources available to solve the problems with which they deal. The move towards deinstitutionalization and community-based service is another sign of a growing trend to entrust families with the responsibility for meeting multifarious human needs. For diverse reasons, families are not always ready or able to take on these responsibilities; nor are they always sufficiently empowered to be effective.

IYF provides an opportunity for reflecting on this massive shift in the orientation of social-policy thinking, and for gaining a perspective on what is required to encourage families to take more responsibility in this process, which is another basic consideration in support of placing the family on the international agenda.

The reconciliation of the needs and responsibilities of families with those of the State reflects another balance that has to be struck: the balance between the rights of individual family members and the concomitant rights and responsibilities of the family as a group. Taken together, these also form a rationale for highlighting internationally the role of the family in society.

Resources: The need for appreciation

One of the social-policy principles most evident in those underlying IYF is that official support to families should empower them in the fulfilment of diverse roles and responsibilities. Such assistance should not replicate the functions of families, nor divorce them from the supportive, productive contribution they offer to society. If it is to be meaningful, however, this principle must be intelligently expressed in policy and practice and constructed in ways that do not distance families from the responsibilities they bear as part of a citizenship and community.

One of the legitimate concerns raised in the context of families is the degree to which family resources are equitably distributed among family members. Another issue is that of who in the family should receive these resources and whether all the contributions of family members to the well-being of the family are accorded equal recognition by the State. Often, the familial resources created by earnings, for example, are recognized while those created by child-rearing and household management are not. In short, much of the thinking about family resources has been conditioned by particular and sometimes outmoded views of productivity in society and, in some cases, of families generally.

Challenging tasks

In years to come, families, as the unifying factor at the grass-roots of society, will have a special role to play. At least three factors will be present in the challenges ahead:

(a) The perennial dichotomy between the individual and society, between individualism and collectivism, between the rights of the individual and those of the family as a collective social unit. There has been growing agreement in recent years that foremost in importance are the individual rights of family members and, particularly, the achievement of equality between men and women as well as between other family members. At the same time, however, society cannot fail to be concerned with economic and social phenomena and behaviour, which are the root causes of major social problems such as abject poverty, unemployment, famine, homeless and

migratory families, child neglect and abuse, domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse, poor care of the elderly or the lack of opportunities for persons with disabilities;

(b) The social welfare process in most countries seems to be undergoing a reassessment of its own. The State is no longer willing to be at the centre of the picture as a powerful all-encompassing social agent for families. The role of the family, therefore, as a provider of basic social services and an important resource base will have to grow;

(c) The family-centred model and other related approaches will become increasingly important, particularly at a time of transition in many countries where the social safety net has disintegrated. The family will have to take over some functions of institutions that have not stood the test of time as effective providers of social services. Any future-oriented effort towards the creation of effective family support policies should not disregard the situation of families in developing countries.

5. Educational function of families

"Education does not commence with the alphabet; it begins with a mother's look, with a father's nod of approbation ... with handfuls of flowers in green dells, on hills and daisy meadows; with birds' nests admired, but not touched; with creeping ants and almost imperceptible emmets; with humming bees and glass beehives; with pleasant walks in shady lanes, and with thoughts directed in sweet and kindly tones ... to beauty, to acts of benevolence, to deeds of virtue, and to all the sources of good."

Anonymous

Culture: The basis of humanity

Culture is much more than the content of the social inheritance, it is an actively produced and experienced way of life. Living culture implicates all its members as active participants in the creation of new ideas, modes of conduct and interpretations of the world. Culture is not a static form made up of formulae and immutable information. It is evolutionary and is progressively affected by the advance of human civilization, particularly in a modern context, by technological innovation and progress. Indeed, the organized knowledge of technology seems to be a prime and growing force for cultural change throughout the world. Culture is embodied in a rapid succession of new products and processes, and institutionalized in systems of thinking about practical problems. In today's shrinking world of communication technology, people are witnessing the birth of, and are participating in, an emerging world culture.

The information society has accelerated the process of socio-cultural change. Space and time do not insulate cultures as they once did. Communication, mobility and the global market-place have brought the diverse cultures of the world into the lives of individuals and families. The multiple sources of cultural information available to individuals around the world offers its peoples and families both an opportunity and a challenge.

On the one hand, cultural exchanges enrich lives, promote global understanding and are a foundation for a world at peace with itself. On the other hand, the current rate of change and the unprecedented growth in information place heavy demands on cultures and reduce their ability to provide direction, security and meaning. The family and education, however, offer important anchors for individuals, providing them with effective mechanisms for assembling and digesting the complex world of experience that is currently available.

In all societies, culture and education foster the harmonious integration of individuals and groups in the community. Economic and social development is determined largely by the prevailing world view of each society: a view influenced by the values transmitted through and implicit in educational systems. Education serves both as a repository of the cultural heritage and as a mechanism for cultural change. Similarly, families can anchor individuals in traditions and transmit the existing cultural heritage or, more importantly, they can also serve as agents of change, reform, and cultural innovation. With families, as with education, it is important to recognize the potency of their effects on people's lives. This power can serve negative or positive ends, and requires vigilant and caring stewardship. The alternatives are chilling, because there are also those who believe, as a twentieth century dictator did, that *"education is a weapon, whose effects depend on who holds it in his hands and at whom it is aimed"*.

Becoming human

The development of culture depends upon continuity, and on the human capacity to learn and transmit knowledge to succeeding generations. Education, as an intergenerational learning process, is not only schooling, but also an apprenticeship in life, which prepares young people to realize their potential and assume a useful role in society. Thus it regenerates and changes society by challenging accepted wisdoms, expanding knowledge and scrutinizing the functioning of existing institutions. The educational process is a comprehensive system that starts in the basic educational institution, the family, and reaches out from there to involve the entire society.

Each individual becomes a person, that is, an aware social human being, through enculturation: through the process of learning how to live in the society into which they are born. Each individual's life is shaped by the way in which culture is mediated for them by others, and each person, in turn, participates in the shaping of culture through interaction with others. The family is at the core of this process and bears the primary responsibility for the socialization of children. It is within the family, with all its echoing relationships, its reflections of a larger world, and its responsiveness to the internal world of each of its members that the initial learning for each individual takes place.

The process of enculturation in itself describes for individuals a way of thinking about the world. The teaching process, therefore, may contain the most important lesson, particularly in the modern information environment where the content of knowledge changes daily. Nowhere is the process of enculturation more important than in the family, where learning and living are so entwined as to be indistinguishable. Families are endowed with the first and most immediate capacity to shape the potentialities of the human person by means of their access to that most beautiful expression of humanity: the open, fresh, curiosity that is the mind of a child.

Families as educators

The World Conference on Education for All: Meeting Basic Learning Needs, held at Jomtien, Thailand, from 5 to 9 March 1990, endorsed the concept that "learning begins at birth". It is well established that the period from birth to the age of six is critical in the formation of intelligence, personality and social behaviour. The learning that occurs in the early months and years of life will either enhance or handicap learning throughout later life. Furthermore, this early development of a child occurs not in isolation, but in the family milieu and is strongly affected by the family and the community. The family has, historically, performed a fundamental role in the process of socialization and, in modern societies, a critically supportive role in education. In cultures where education is valued highly, it has been observed that a stable family system is a major factor in encouraging children to acquire education. In contrast, the decline in educational attainment in some developed countries has been partly attributed to the decline of familial support systems.

Despite the growing support for the view that education is an essential right of all individuals, the decisions of society collectively and of parents individually still determine the amount and kind of education that any child receives, either formally or informally. A number of factors play an important role in those decisions including: the economic situation of parents, their social traditions and degree of exposure to the forces of modernization, and their level of appreciation of the importance of schooling, as well as their general attitudes to the values that education should impart. Social priorities and economic conditions often limit or enhance the commitment of the State to education. The current financial crisis faced by many countries has shifted a larger part of the burden of education to parents, further taxing the ability of families to meet their needs at all levels, and adapt to the mammoth changes required of them.

The tremendous transformations occurring in and around the family, combined with the early social maturation of children, their ability to earn incomes independently of the family, and the development of a youth culture in developed countries, have all diminished the influence of the family in the process of socialization in late childhood and early adulthood. Single-parenthood, for example, has increased the responsibility of the sole parent to feed, shelter and educate children, often without the necessary support and collaboration of the other parent, or indeed the State. New communication technologies in education, particularly the introduction of computer science and computer-aided instruction into schools and universities, along with the increasing variety of video and audio equipment and programmes, are changing the socialization process during school years in largely unknown ways. These educative changes are often so rapid that parents are not able to identify with their children's educational experience. Consequently, as in so many other areas of daily life, families face severe challenges in their attempts to continue to perform a supportive role in the education of their children in a changed and fluid educational environment.

6. Families and peace

"Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed."

Constitution of the United Nations Educational,
Scientific and Cultural Organization

Preparing for life in peace

The awareness of the constant need for peace and international security to be built concurrently into the practice of international relations and in the human mind has a long tradition and record of action. Unfortunately, as many writers, thinkers and politicians have long pointed out, humanity has developed more of an education for and mentality of war than an education for and mentality of peace.

As the eminent Italian educator Maria Montessori put it, on a global scale, education for peace, in comparison with present-day armaments, has remained practically at the level of the bow and arrow. Following the explosion of the first atom bomb over Hiroshima, the renowned scientist Albert Einstein concluded that nuclear energy had changed everything except people's way of thinking, thus crisply putting his finger on the moral problem that confronted not just him alone: the immense and widening gap between the advances in technological civilization and the state of human consciousness.

The founding of the United Nations released new efforts to promote peace education. Despite the mounting tensions of the cold war period, a number of United Nations resolutions and declarations reflected a positive trend towards well-conceived education for peace. Equally important were numerous initiatives pursued by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to found peace upon the intellectual and moral solidarity of human beings. All those efforts culminated in a major United Nations instrument: the Declaration on the Preparation of Societies for Life in Peace, which was adopted by the General Assembly in its resolution 33/73 of 15 December 1978.

Preparing societies for life in peace is a specific kind of education and is perhaps a more complex and somewhat different process than the one ordinarily meant by the classical term of education. While the latter seems slightly restrictive and one-directional, the former is meant to make all persons at the same time subjects and objects of one process, as students and teachers of the same process: both individually as persons, members of families and citizens of one earth; and collectively as States and members of the same family of nations. Preparation for peace also implies the inherent human right of every nation and of every person to a life in peace. Indeed, the haunting presence of war, conflict and tension are constant reminders of the importance of peace and of the need for peace education at all levels, including the very basic one, that of the family.

Peace, however, is not merely a state in which war is absent. Peace is both a socially and politically constructed quality. Peace is a construction: something that takes at least two parties to create. The plans for this construction emanate from a vision of the world at peace: a vision that can be developed through peace education, particularly in the context of the family.

Learning to be peaceful

Peace must also be learned and this learning is pivotal to its achievement. Putting aside the long-standing dispute about whether the state of human nature is innately violent and competitive or peaceful, a personal experience of peace often suggests how a person should be living, while a personal experience of life often tells persons that they are not living as they should be. It is through learning and education that the activity of each human being can be conditioned to respect the collective need for peace, despite the long history of war and conflict.

There are innumerable theories in the area of cognitive development that are appropriate to the question of peace education. Of these, those that seek to integrate the individual and social dimensions of human development prompt the most interesting reflections. Peace is something that is understood as part of a person's relationship with people or with those elements of the planet that are external to the self. This is true of peace between nations; of peace and harmony with nature; of peace within society; of peace between persons; or of peace in the family.

The family as the nucleus of peace education

A look at the challenge of educating for peace, and particularly at the investment in the education that is offered to the next generation, clearly shows that the family will figure prominently in the process. The most basic human education takes place long before institutional learning. In fact, such education takes place early in life, in the context of a very finite and familiar set of relationships. The process of human learning begins in the family. The child, in contact with "significant others" such as siblings or parents, becomes aware of its self and of others. It is in the family that sympathetic understanding is born. First, through imitation (of gestures, intonations, behavioural habits) and later through role-playing and role-taking, when the child perceives and constructs a limited but coherent view of the world and its place in it. From the cognitive and emotional point of view, there is no possibility of "capturing" the concept of peace unless the individual is first able to understand the view of others, and can assimilate information from different perspectives in meaningful and self-affirming ways.

The most basic methodology for peace education are the patterns and styles of social interaction in the family. Numerous studies have established a relationship between parental styles and child development. Although this literature covers the spectrum of parent and child relationships, the issue of violence in households offers particular insights into the issue of peace education in families.

The intergenerational transmission of violent behaviour in families is an established, albeit dismal, fact of social life. Children who witness or are the victims of violence are more likely to be violent in adult life. An abused child is more likely to grow up to abuse his or her own children.

As learning begins and is established in families, it is clear that family life provides more than a model for behaviour. Family life intimately, directly and intensely affects the very structure of each person's understanding of others, of the self, and of his or her relationship with the external world. A family that lives in peace, offers not only a model of domestic tranquillity, but also an entire vocabulary for understanding the world of children, adults and, ultimately, the world of nations.

The entire repertoire of each person's modes of behaviour, especially those that constitute his or her daily routines, are deeply embedded in the history of his or her family relationships. These learned modes are more than gestures, external expressions and single attitudes but complete sets of responses to social situations. The kind of learning that takes place in families teaches a person more than words; it implants in him or her the very structure of social language.

A familial pedagogy for peace

The pedagogy for peace is a living and inspiring science. The earliest education a person receives teaches him or her how to think; namely, how to organize and make sense of the world of physical and social experience. It is at this level that every family faces choices such as deciding what motives can be imputed to others, how conflict can be understood or peaceful resolution valued. In families, a person learns (or does not learn) how to recognize fear, insecurity or malice in others.

The symptoms and causes of a non-peaceful world surround each person daily. For all persons, and particularly children, this daily exposure can breed complacency, acceptance and insensitivity. The world of everyday life is, to a large extent, composed of non-reflective and time-honoured routines that are taken for granted. The decision to refuse the intrusion of non-peaceful behaviour into those routines must be the conscious act of a vigilant will. The methodology of peace education in families requires reflection, discussion and adopting the practice of having second thoughts as primary social instincts. Too often children learn the horrible logic of "an eye for an eye" in the casual advice of a parent, in the practice of discipline in the home or in the cruel pecking order of the local playground.

As with many simple truths, peace is more difficult to put into practice than to espouse: it is much harder to do than to believe. Peace in the family requires opportunities for reflection and discussion, where new and peaceful understandings can be cultivated and nurtured. As with all routines, non-peaceful interpretations of the world are often supported by the weight of established culture. Only in the family, and in families everywhere, can one hope to engender the kind of self-assurance, will, durability and personal courage required to be reflective and committed to the cause of peace, despite pressures or conveniences to the contrary.

The boundaries of family have served negative purposes, such as hiding the atrocities of child abuse or the subjugation of women. In the positive case, the boundaries of family should provide a sanctuary from the forces of society, where new and constructive ideologies can be nurtured and practiced. A familial pedagogy for peace is a lived and active process, involving choices and conscious decision-making. Teaching peace also involves encouraging and maintaining an environment where questioning the established order of things is accepted and routine. In the final analysis, it means providing, in all its symbolic richness, a sanctuary for reflection and peacefulness.

Lessons of the family for the world

A living peace between family members holds the promise of creating a lived tradition of peace in society generally. Clearly, the family that lives by such principles as mutual respect, empathy and kindness will cultivate a sense of the rights of others that can be transported to society. Family relationships between men and women can and should reflect a full and equal partnership such as would be aspired to in society at large. The proliferation of peace in and by families can also help to build broader stability, as the backbone of the happiness of the family and indeed of secure societies, where social peace is basic to progress and development.

The family at peace exposes its members to the living principles of a peaceful world. Such living principles include reciprocity, respect for the rights of others, sharing of responsibilities, sympathetic understanding, self-affirmation in the face of personal differences, tolerance, freedom from fear, security and love. As these principles are expressed in the daily life of a family, through familial interaction, fundamentally important perspectives on the rights and needs of people are embedded in the world view of its members. The literature on families, and the problems of families, are often analogous to the problems of nation States. A case in point is the issue of conflict management in families. Families differ markedly in the way that conflicts are resolved (or not resolved). Approaches range from avoidance or physical punishment to

negotiation and concession. With families, as with nations, choices on the approach to be adopted must be made.

Clearly, with families as with nations, all non-peaceful forms of conflict resolution should be considered as a failure or as a lack of commitment to the consistent and peaceful conflict resolution of conflicts. With the planet, as with families, it cannot be expected that conflicts and disagreements will simply go away. Children no longer rely on their parents, and often reject parental protection as controlling, unfair and unnecessary. As adult partners grow, develop and change in the course of relationships, they need to learn interpersonal skills that promote ongoing negotiations and discussion in an atmosphere of mutual respect. Consequently, peace in families is not an established fact of life. Peace is not a state of being: it is a learned process. Family is not a static form: it is an evolving entity.

No world progress seems to be achievable unless it is led by enlightened and peaceful-minded contributors, be it at the grass-roots, national or global levels. Pope Paul VI once said that there would be no disarmament of weapons, if there was no disarmament of hearts. Recent years have amply shown how much can be accomplished, in a peaceful way, if leaders or whole populations are committed to the peaceful resolution of conflict. Indeed, the new face of the globe and the considerable progress in disarmament can be attributed to the disarmament of hearts. Despite the turbulence being experienced in many parts of the world a new environment is in the making, an ecology of more peaceful thinking and inner commitment to peace, which has its roots in, and derives its nourishment from, the family.

7. The future of the family

"The worth of the State, in the long run, is the worth of the individuals composing it."

John Stuart Mill

The principle of subsidiarity

The dynamic diversity of families offers each person a remarkable opportunity of making a fundamental impact on the future of the planet, in the cause of peace and social justice, and on his or her own life. Families are integral to the global structure of subsidiarity which, in the human quest for a better world, seeks out solutions to problems at the lowest possible level of the societal structure.

As a link in the total system of subsidiarity, from an individual to the planet, the family has demonstrated itself to be the most universally resilient, durable and flexible social form known. The family will persevere under constant change, and probably it will survive. This is the lesson of history, which also provides the reason why, given such a record of survival, IYF is needed or desirable for the support and protection of families.

The unknown family

One of the difficulties that has plagued the efforts of Governments to deal with the question of families in social policy is the lack of a clear understanding of what families are. This difficulty has been complicated by the many changes that have been rapidly unfolding in family structures, and the diversity of forms found within and between national societies.

One of the great paradoxes surrounding families in the context of social policy is that, despite the fact that Governments are turning to families for solutions, there is a significant lack of official information on families. In short, there is much about families that is not known.

Often what one claims to know about families is founded more on stereotypes, intuition, anecdote and experience than on a rigorous and systematically constructed understanding of what families are. Furthermore, the family has undergone such profound changes recently that the view of families held by many policy makers, scholars and others may not be an accurate reflection of families as they currently are. Nor is it clear that the existing legal and policy frameworks for families reflect the contemporary realities of family life. Given the increasing reliance of social policy on families, the efforts to rediscover the family through strengthened research activity is an important objective of IYF.

Families in need

Despite the critical need to undertake research, a significant body of literature and knowledge exists that must be brought to the attention of legislators and policy bodies in order to inform and provoke them to take constructive action. Such knowledge must include some of those things that are known but that people are hesitant even to recognize. There are societies, for instance, where girl children are left to starve, because they are considered to be of no use; where twins are abandoned because they are considered to be a manifestation of evil; and where children are being sold into slavery or prostitution.

Human beings display their ignorance and indifference towards and within families in many ways. These include the selfishness of an adult; child abuse and neglect; inequality between family members expressed, *inter alia*, by the abuse and exploitation of women; the insensitive cruelty with which human beings sometimes act, or don't act. Such ignorance and indifference is also seen in the hypocrisy with which human beings do something, because it is easy or visible, and shut their minds to the needs of others. Finally, the harbouring of racist, sexist or other intolerant attitudes represents some of the most persistent forms of ignorance.

Families of the world are under sustained and heavy stress. Economic and political transformations in many parts of the world, environmental problems, disease, war, poverty, famine and other such forces are taxing them, often beyond their ability to cope. Such pressures are clearly not confined to the developing world, witness the pressures generated in families by unemployment, drugs, crime, and the scourge of the acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS). Families are often left to mediate these pressures by themselves and many will need help, if they are to be successful.

Major tools for action

With its primary focus on action at the local and national levels, supported by regional and international action, IYF should: strengthen national institutions, enabling them to formulate, implement and monitor policies; enhance the effectiveness of local, regional and national efforts to carry out specific programmes; stimulate efforts to respond to problems affecting, and affected by, the situation of families; improve collaboration between national and international non-governmental organizations in support of multisectoral activities and, last but not least, build upon the results of international activities on social issues of direct concern to many organizations of the United Nations system and outside of it. In the search for the strongest and most viable family environment, which might rekindle the flame of family solidarity, IYF seems to be a step in the right direction.

Priorities should be identified at the local and national levels, and each country, as well as each organization, should elaborate its own programme for IYF. The primary responsibility for preparing for and observing IYF is at the national level.

The guiding principles of IYF envisage that its activities should lead to the equal and full enjoyment of individual rights, both within the context of the family and throughout society. IYF should contribute to the development and strengthening of perceptions and perspectives regarding the family and intra-familial relationships that are consistent with basic human rights, fundamental freedoms, and internationally accepted social policy standards and principles. Important elements promoting the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women, 2/ the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, 3/ the Convention on the Rights of the Child 4/ and the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children and the Plan of Action for Implementing the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children in the 1990s, 5/ as well as United Nations global plans and programmes of action in the field of ageing, disability, youth and crime prevention.

Challenges to meet

A distinctive feature of United Nations efforts to meet current social policy challenges is the necessity for Governments in all countries, irrespective of the level of material development or the socio-cultural context, to be fully aware that their political and economic objectives can be achieved only if they give their fullest attention to social aims as well. Without wanting to belittle

the precarious economic situation in many regions of the world, two perceptions are still prevalent and must be overcome if a better world is to be achieved for families. They are the following:

(a) That there is a dichotomy between "economic" needs and "social" needs, and that the latter are subordinate to the former. The allocation of resources still appears to be inhibited by the persistence of such orthodox thinking; however, what is "economic" and what is "social" are but two perceptions of a single reality;

(b) That social development is concerned with marginal sections of society and is of no great relevance to the central issues of economic and political development. Social development, however, concerns entire populations as well as their disadvantaged sections and is central to the problems of productivity, growth, welfare and stability.

Social policy must seek to overcome these limited perceptions if the human condition is to improve, the eradication of poverty is to be a realistic goal and society is to be based upon the principle of distributive justice. As the *Human Development Report 1991* 6/ in its opening sentence concluded: "the lack of political commitment, not of financial resources, is often the real cause of human neglect".

IYF is not a house that is already built, in which people can look for the room that suits them: it is a process of construction, requiring the energy, input and commitment of those who will live in it. This distinction is basic to an understanding of IYF, and to the vision of 1994. The opportunity and challenge beckon, the door is open and the time is ripe.

Notes

1/ General Assembly resolution 44/82 of 8 December 1989.

2/ *Report of the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace, Nairobi, 15-26 July 1985* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.85.IV.10), chap. I, sect. A.

3/ General Assembly resolution 34/180, annex, of 18 December 1979.

4/ General Assembly resolution 44/25 of 20 November 1989.

5/ "Ceremony for the presentation of the Declaration and Plan of Action adopted by world leaders at the World Summit for Children: Note by the Secretary-General" (A/45/625, annex).

6/ United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 1991* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1991).